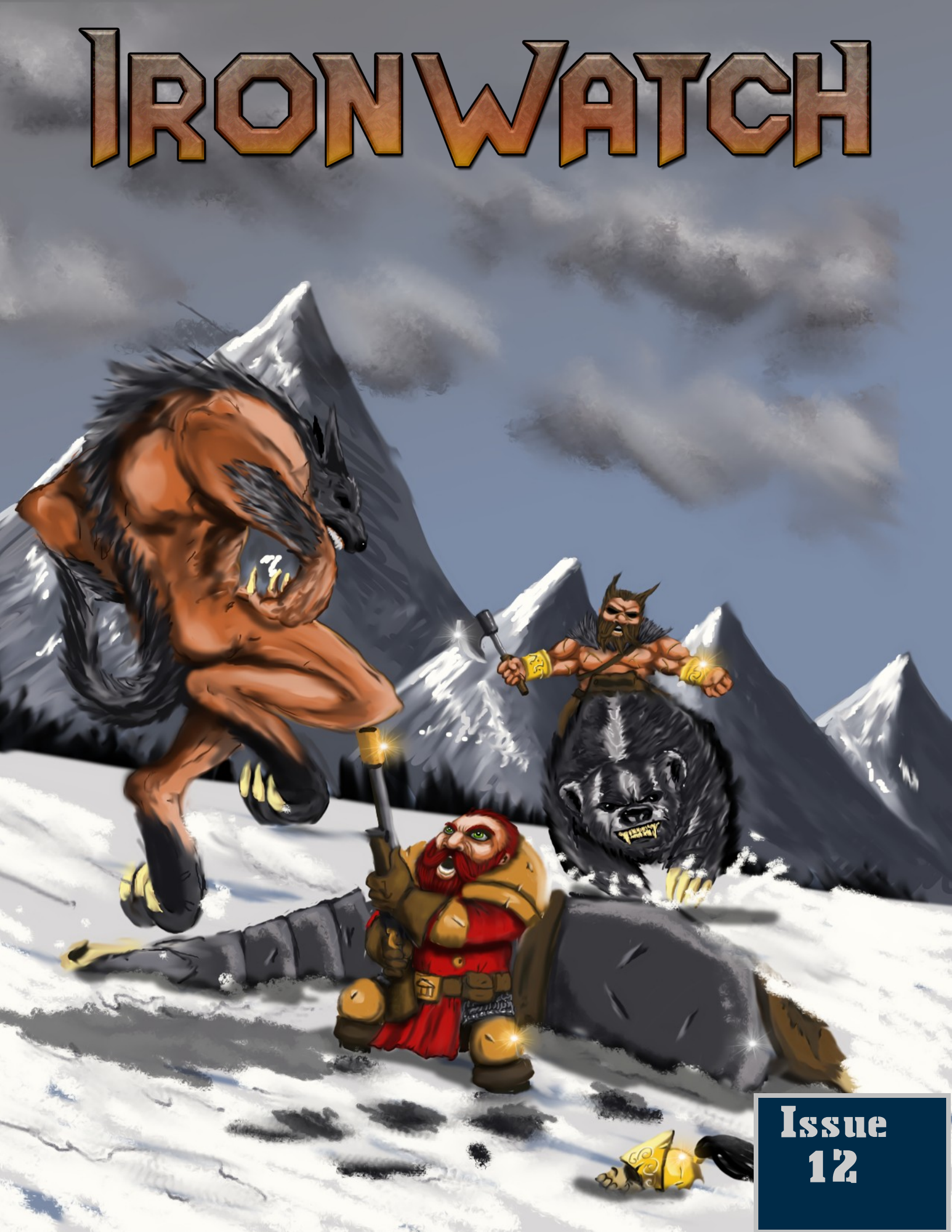
IronWatch



Issue 12

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ABYSSAL TIDINGS

A Message from the Editor

We're incredibly glad to welcome in the twelfth issue of the IRONWATCH fan magazine. It's been an amazing year, and we are incredibly thankful for your support throughout the start of this endeavor. Reliance on fan-made content means that the success of the publication relies on you, the reader and supporter, and thus far it's been nothing but solid, wonderful support. Thank you.

Be sure to keep your eyes peeled sometime later this month, before Issue 13, as we're looking to assemble an Ironwatch Annual. This will be a compilation of issues 1-12, all in a single pdf, for your consolidated reading pleasure. If you found any corrections in previous issues as well, please let us know, as the Annual will attempt to fix all of the minor corrections as well!

As always, thank you very much for your support over this last year and the years to come. Whether you're a first time reader or a supporter since the start, thanks for reading, and Welcome to the Watch!

-Austin

Cover art by Boris Samec
Title art by Mark Smith

Please note that, while we here at **Ironwatch** *attempt to deliver you the best products and ideas we can, we cannot guarantee the balance of any scenarios or special rules presented herein. If you find any errors, grammar mistakes, or rule imbalances, please contact us on the Mantic Forums (Look for the discussion labeled "Ironwatch Issue X Feedback") and let us know what we could do to improve your fan-produced magazine. If you are interested in writing, illustrating, or editing for our magazine, please let us know on the feedback discussion as well so you can get in on the action!*

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The Iron Forge

Welcome back to the Iron Forge! For those of you just joining us, here's a quick recap on how the Iron Forge works:

The team's initial goal is to produce one newly painted Mantic model each for every issue of the magazine. While real life might mean not everyone can make it every month, I'm hoping we gain enough momentum to make this a real success and can also start to call on guest painters for some issues too. We'll also be happy to feature dioramas, full units, teams or whole armies – anything that provides inspiration and creativity to really show off Mantic's great range of models.

If the community like the new feature we can get more creative, with tutorials, tip and tricks, themed issues and the like. Your feedback and ideas are most welcome to help us gauge the reaction to this new venture and what you would like to see.

The Iron Forge Painting Team are:
Matt Gilbert, Nick Williams, Christian Schlumpberger, Claudia Zuminich, Paul Scott and Darren Lysenko. Of course, Austin has said he might chip in too :)

Please use the Ironwatch feedback threads on the Mantic forums to let us know what you think. I hope you enjoy this month's inaugural set of pictures.

-Matt▪

By Chris Schlumpberger

Chris Schlumpberger

There are two things that I always try to achieve when I'm painting miniatures: contrast and a limited set of colors. Both are usually pillars of a good color scheme and both were used for my ogre as well. There are even two kinds of contrast to be found here: bright/dark and cold/warm. While skin and hair serve the ice theme of the model, the golden armor creates a warm contrast that emphasizes the color of the skin and makes it look even brighter.

When I was looking for an idea to paint my upcoming ogre army, I decided to try an ice theme, created after the look of the White Walkers from the Game of Thrones TV series. Coming up with a solution for the skin was the most difficult bit, in the end I used a wash mixed from Vallejo Pale Grey Wash, Vallejo Electric Blue

CHRIS SCHLUMPBERGER

and Tamiya airbrush thinner over white primer and added highlights with Vallejo Ghost Grey. For the hair I used Pale Grey Wash over white primer and added highlights with GW Ceramite White. The armor was simply done with GW Tinbitz and Vallejo Glorious Gold. Nothing special, but it did the trick.

Now that this guy has turned out so well it's time to paint a whole army, with sledges instead of chariots and ice-zombified humans as goblin troops. Fun times ahead!

DARREN LYSENKO

This version of Mee'Kel Judwan is obviously a massive departure from the original color scheme.

I had the Rocky theme tune stuck in my head while painting him and I think he went from being "modest and unassuming despite being the heir to the Judwan Throne" to becoming the Apollo Creed of Dreadball!

This rendition is the consummate showman, bursting onto the pitch to the blaring strains of some cheesy, alien rock song, high-fiving the crowd and showing off his monogrammed cape.

Perhaps a bit too much of a break from the official colors for many people's tastes, but I really love him and can see a whole team of orange and blue Judwan on the cards at some point soon!

Matt Gilbert

This model is a variation on a scheme I put together for the Pathfinder Enforcers. It wasn't chosen as the final version but I thought I'd see if I could have another go on my Enforcer captain.

A recent trip to Tabletop Nation to run the Pathfinder Kings of War regional event, found me browsing the Vallejo Model Color paint range. Ostensibly I was trying to pick up some colors I'd run out of but I was also keeping an eye out for shades that I thought would work well for this model.

In the end I picked up: Medium Sea Green (70.870) which was used for the main armor plates; Pale Grey/Blue (70.907) which I used for the base coat on any white areas; Amarantha Red (70.829) which was the base for the orange. I also found a nice Light Yellow (70.949) which I uses on both the blade and the gun highlights.

I repositioned the model slightly from the standard pose and then attached it plus some slate stones to the base before sanding it and then spraying the whole piece with Halfords Grey Primer. I painted and drybrushed the base first as I thought it would be safer than finishing the model and then accidently getting paint on the feet. Not

MATT GILBERT

the usual way round but it did the trick.

I actually painted the eyes red to start with but it looked bland too similar to the orange. The glowing green makes a much better contrast to the orange (although I might have overdone it!). The power cable feeding the blade is also glowing with a little bit of OSL work casting blue light on the grey armor plates nearby.

The grass tufts are Swamp and Wilderness ones from Army Painter.

GERARD MCLAUGHLIN

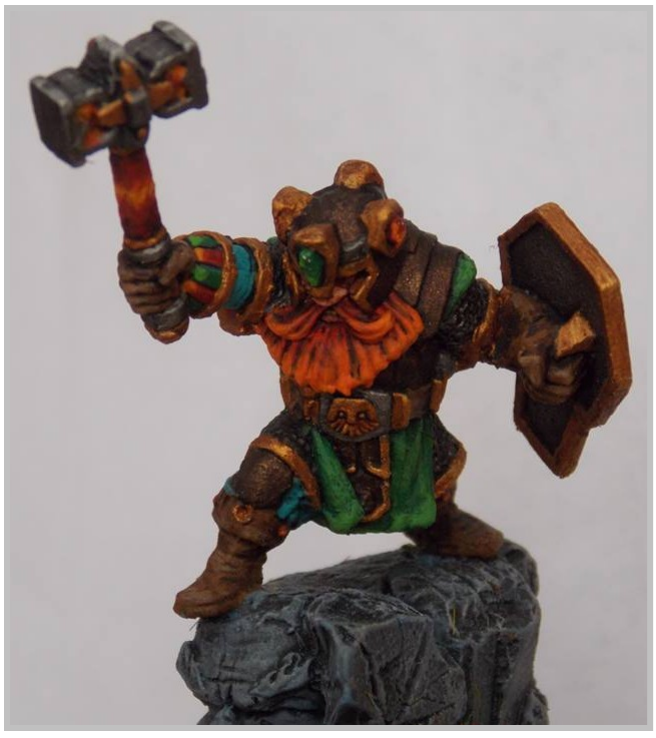
Started off giving the whole model an army painter wolf grey undercoat once dry I gave it an all over wash of a 50/50 mix of black and blue inks, these will be painted over but a wash helps show up all the details I always do it before I start painting to me its just part of the undercoating process.

Next I gave everything a rough base coat of its color this way I can see if I like the scheme before I get too far into the model, once I had a scheme I was happy with (I tried a few) I started to give the model its proper first coat I always do this in the same way starting in the middle and work out towards the edges, helps reduce accidentally touching a painted bit with another color by mistake since most of the fiddly bits tend to be near the edges.

Once the colors were solid its wash time I always use watered down washes and start with an all over then once dry another in the recesses. I then build the color back up getting lighter on the raised surfaces this I do by using the original color and then slowly start adding lighter tones to the same color, i.e. red, then 80/20 red -orange, then 70/30 red-orange, etc.

Once done its time for one last all over look and touch up any misses or mistakes before an all over purity seal.

Job done



By Darren Lysenko

Kings of War Bestiary

By Matt Gilbert

Many of us have large model collections, often representing many years of being in the hobby and from a wide variety of manufacturers. Often in these large collections lurk huge models that fire the imagination, look amazingly cool, but all too often do little more than occupy shelf space.

This is the first article in what is hoped to be a way of addressing this unfortunate state of affairs. It's a call to arms for the giants and behemoths of Mantica and offers them a chance to stride forth from the shadows from where they wait to demonstrate their might on the table-top.

These big models are intended for use in big games of Kings of War. As a rule of thumb, multiple the value of the unit by 10 to calculate the recommended minimum army size in which to include it. Otherwise, treat them as simply additional Monster choices for the army (or armies) indicated. So for example, the Undead Dragon is 250 points so you should only consider taking one in an army of 2500 points or more.

If you have any of your own monsters you would like to have included to help expand this Bestiary, please let us know with the proposed rules and preferably a picture and we'll consider your submission for inclusion.

New Special Rules

Colossus

Any unit with this rule can stride over obstacles with ease and treats any such terrain as clear, open ground. They will never suffer any penalties for crossing or fighting over obstacles (fences and hedges are not going to stop a Titan…).

Thunderous Charge

If a unit with this rule declares a Charge! and the distance from the unit to the nearest point of the target is equal to or greater than the Charging unit's Speed value, it will gain Crushing Strength(1) in the following Melee phase against the target unit. If the unit already has Crushing Strength, the value is increased by 1 in the following Melee. Essentially, if the unit has enough ground to build momentum for its charge, the impact will be greater.

Terrifying
When testing the Nerve of an enemy unit in combat with one or more of your units with this special rule, you can add +2 to your total, as the horrifying aura of the units takes its toll on the foe's morale.

By Matt Gilbert

Monsters:

Undead War-mammoth with Catapult: 250 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
War-mammoth	1	5	4+	5+	5+	1/10*	-/19

Type: Monster
Army: Undead
Special: Shambling, Crushing Strength (3), Piercing (2), Indirect, Blast (2D6), Evil Dead
*1 ranged attack with the catapult (48" range) and 10 Melee attacks.

Note that the unit doesn't have the Reload! rule as the beast counts as a "stable" platform. However, there will still be a -1 if it moves and fires.

Undead War-mammoth: 200 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
War-mammoth	1	5	4+	-	5+	12	-/19

Type: Monster
Army: Undead
Special: Shambling, Crushing Strength (3), Evil Dead

Undead Dragon: 250 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Undead Dragon	1	10	4+	-	5+	10	-/18

Type: Monster
Army: Undead
Special: Fly, Crushing Strength (2), Evil Dead

Giant Undead Dragon: 575 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Giant Undead Dragon	1	12	4+	-	5+	20	-/30

Type: Monster
Army: Undead

Special: Fly, Crushing Strength (3), Evil Dead

Titan: 400 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Titan	1	6	4+	-	6+	10	18/20

Type: Monster
Army: Any
A giant among giants…
Special: Crushing Strength (4), Colossus, Blast(D3)
*Roll for the number of Attacks each time this unit fights a Melee

Undead Titan: 400 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Undead Titan	1	6	5+	-	6+	4D6*	-/20

Type: Monster
Army: Undead
Special: Shambling, Crushing Strength (4), Evil Dead, Colossus
*Roll for the number of Attacks each time this unit fights a Melee

Steppe Hunter: 275 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Steppe Hunter	1	7	3+	-	5+	12	16/18

Type: Monster
Army: Any
This unit represents any suitably massive wolf/bear/cat model you want to unleash

Special: Crushing Strength (2), Vicious, Thunderous Charge

Mountain Drake: 650 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Mountain Drake	1	12	3+	-	7+	18	20/22

Type: Monster
Army: Any
This unit represents any suitably massive dragon model you may have in your collection
Special: Fly, Crushing Strength (3), Breath Attack (20).

By Paul Scott

By Mantic Games, Used with Permission

Elven War-God: 350 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Elven War-God	1	7	3+	-	5+	12	18/20

Type: Monster
Army: Elves
This unit gives anyone with a Mantic Elf 3-up model to field it in a game
Special: Crushing Strength (3), Elite, Inspiring

Dwarfen Hold Guardian: 350 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Dwarfen Hold Guardian	1	5	4+	-	6+	15	18/20

By Mantic Games, Used with Permission

Type: Monster
Army: Dwarfs
This unit gives anyone with a Mantic Dwarf 3-up model to field it in a game
Special: Crushing Strength (4), Headstrong, Inspiring

Dragon-kin: 400 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Dragon Kin	1	8	4+	-	6+	18	22/24

Type: Monster
Army: Any Evil army
A monstrous amalgam of ogre and dragon or other foul beast of the wild
Special: Crushing Strength (2), Headstrong, Vicious, Thunderous Charge

Hydra: 380 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Hydra	1	5	4+	-	5+	15	18/20

Type: Monster
Army: Any Neutral or Evil army
A many headed monstrosity that lairs deep within mountain caves
Special: Crushing Strength (2), Breath Attack (12) x 2*
*The Hydra may fire both Breath Attacks in the same Shoot phase and may target a different enemy unit with each, or may use both on the same target. Nominate all targets first and then roll the dice.

Jabberwock: 320 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Jabber-wock	1	6	4+	-	6+	16	16/18

Type: Monster
Army: Any Good or Neutral
Solitary creatures found in the foothills of Mantica they are slow, powerful flyers.
Special: Crushing Strength (3), Fly

Abyssal Nightmare: 600 points

Name	Number	Sp	Me	Ra	De	At	Ne
Night-mare	1	10	3+	-	7+	5D6*	-/20

Type: Monster
Army: Twilight Kin, Abyssal Dwarf or Forces of the Abyss
Greater Demons from the fiery depths of the Abyss. To summon a Nightmare is to sell your soul to the devil itself.
Special: Crushing Strength (4), Fly, Very Inspiring, Terrifying
*Roll for the number of Attacks each time this unit fights a Melee.▪

By Boris Samec

By Jonathan Faulkes

Elven Tactics

By Jason Flint

Welcome fellow wargamer to a series of articles on how, in my opinion at least, is the best way to use your Elven army. Remember that in this game, you cannot expect to win by building a power based army. The game is about moving and out-witting your opponent. This guide is for those who are thinking about an Elven army, and are wandering where to start or what to do, or for some reason are struggling to make them work.

So to do this, I will have to break things down and explain them in sections. In this first article I will cover the Elven army as a whole, and the core Infantry units which should make up the bulk of your force, and I will also cover the 2 War Machine options. This means that everything in the 1 player battleset is covered, which is a good starting point for an Elven Army.

The Elven Army

The Elven army is a quick moving, but very fragile army. With a basic move of 6, they can outpace men and run circles around Dwarves. Don't over look this single extra point of movement, "At the Double" this

becomes an extra 2", and more importantly for chargers, there is no reason why you should not dictate the chargers and who fights who. In most circumstances against enemy infantry, they will have to move within your charge range to charge themselves, giving you the option of whether to break ranks and counter charge, or hold the line. On the offensive side, you can move to within charge range without leaving your own units vulnerable to an enemy charge.

The price of this speed is survivability. A Elf warrior, clad in Elven armor with a large shield is defense 4+, and for the core of your army this is a good as it gets. Very few units have Def 5+, and rarer still is Def 6+. Whereas many armies have access to heavy infantry in the form of Revenants, Foot Guard and Iron Guard, the Elven 'Heavy Infantry' comes in the form of Palace Guard, who while they pack a punch in combat, have a mighty Defense of....4+.

The Elves are also a very professional army. This is represented by a few things, their high Nerve despite their fragility, means they will often stick about a bit longer even when they take a lot of damage that would rout men. They have great stats to hit in both range and melee with most units. Their ranged units come with both a base Range and Melee of 4+, so even these units can be committed to combat with a good chance of inflicting some damage, as well hitting targets at long range. Finally is the army special rule, "Elite". This allows a single attack dice to be re-rolled for each unit. The use of this varies from unit to unit, some not noticing it, others are dependant on it.

For all of this, Elves are expensive in points. Compared to other units armies can choose from, Elves are a pricey army to use. One of the worst comparisons is seeing how many units and undead army will take compared to yours!

So a fast moving, elite but very fragile force. For this article I will run over the core Infantry units and Warmachines.

Spearmen.

These are the backbone of your army. Phalanx as standard and 4+ to hit in combat means they often kick out a lot of damage. Never take these in anything less than a Regiment, you are wasting points and the potential of these. A Regiment will give you the bonus attacks and the Nerve high

By "Maccwar"

By Matt Gilbert

enough to go against elite enemy infantry. These are a fantastic choice in your force. Hordes are downright dangerous, with 30 attacks they will butcher most small units they touch, and boost them with a magic item (Brew of strength is a good choice) and they will start chopping through tougher units too. If you play defensively, often the first things to hit your lines will be enemy cavalry and flyers, so these are your front line units and are good at both defensive and aggressive styles of play.

Bowmen.

With Range 4+, these are incredibly accurate with their bows, unleashing a volley of shots from these at close range will often leave your opponent with a nervous twitch. They carry shields, meaning their Defense is still 4+, the same as Spearmen. However do not mistake these as having the same role as Spearmen, who having Phalanx, have a better chance of survival against the things that will hit your line first (Cavalry and Flyers typically) Bowmen carry a high cost tag, 120 points for a troop and 160 for a Regiment! Meaning a Regiment of Spearmen is cheaper than a troop of these. I would not recommend taking
troops of these, as their extremely high points cost means they are easy points for your opponent who is likely to rout them after 6 points of damage. Even taking a Regiment of them requires some serious thinking about what else you could take for that points cost. A horde with a magic item (The Jar of 4 winds comes to mind) can be very expensive, but the combined effect of magic item on high volume of attacks makes this the more worthy choice of the 3.

Scouts.

These are a great choice for your army, and ideally you should always include a couple of these. They drop their shields, meaning their defense is a terrible 3+! But, for this, Troops gain "Nimble" and "Vanguard" and cost 105 points, compared to their rival bowmen costing 120. The importance of these 2 special rules cannot be stated enough. Vanguard allows you to move them forward after deployment, and if you're not on the attack, don't feel you need to move them the whole distance. Simply bringing your opponent into range with the vanguard move (as you must deploy 24" apart, meaning on Turn 1 your bows are out of range) means if you take turn 1, you won't have to move your scouts to be in range, meaning your initial shots will hit on 5+, rather than 6+. "Nimble" will come in use as your opponent closes in on you, and you can maneuver your scout units to threaten their flanks. With a base of 10 attacks at Melee 4+, your opponent cannot ignore a flank

charge from these, potentially doubling to 20 attacks! Troops of these are a winner every time, Regiments of these however loose their special rules. However at 20 points cheaper than Bowmen, do not rule them out as a cheaper way of getting solid units of bowfire onto the table.

SeaGuard.

These are over pointed. By a lot. While the unit on paper looks fierce, the combination of phalanx and bows, you must look at what you can get for those points. The only time these units are credible is when you know the battle ahead will be packed and you will have little space to move. But even then when I used these units in such battles, they simply were not credible. Sorry folks but this is one unit I will say "Do Not Use".

Palace Guard

These are your Elite infantry, packing Melee 3+ with crushing strength, when these guys connect they will take a chunk out of your opponents units! Despite sacrificing a shield, they retain their Def 4+ thanks to some seriously well made armor. Palace Guard lack the option of Hordes, but give you the option of Half Regiments and Troops, a Troop being just 5 models and a Half Regiment being what we commonly know as Troops (10 models). While 50 points for a 5 man unit is a good way to use up some spare points, I don't recommend that you take these as standard. 5 attacks is not enough to do the damage that you need to. Half Regiments work a treat if you mingle them amongst your spearmen, though boost them up to a Regiment if you intend for them to fight it out on the main line. This unit should hit once and ideally waver or break your opponents unit, as you do not want them counter charged. They are still as fragile as any other of your units.

With the core infantry units covered, I will do my best to you a run down on whether to take Banners and Musicians for units. This is a long running debate, and ultimately there is no right or wrong answer.

<u>Banners</u>

At 15 points this is pricey. Remember that a troop of Spearmen is 80, and a Regiment 110, meaning you pay 30 points for that Nerve increase of 3. However a Banner effectively gives you +1 Nerve, for 15 points.

By "Weedyelf"

By Paul Scott

Based on this, I don't recommend Banners on Troops. For the most part anyway, a Troop which has took a lot of damage is likely to flee anyway. A Regiment with a Banner however, is much more durable. But again, which units will require it? If you have a unit which you hide until the time is right to use it, is a Banner really necessary? Whereas units which will attract a lot of attention and will no doubt see a lot of combat, the extra help really does sometimes save them. I recommend taking Banners for your Spearmen Regiments, to further increase their durability.

Musicians

At 10 points these are a bit cheaper of the 2, but have a more limited use. They only work in melee and give you +1 to your Nerve checks against enemy units. So, paying 10 points for one means that you have made your opponents 15 point banner ineffective. Also remember that the blade of slashing is 5 points, which still requires you to hit, and damage, for what is effectively the same thing. So for what it delivers a musician seems much more worthwhile. But they are still points down the drain if they are not used. Don't waste them on ranged units, or ones where breaking your opponent instantly is less important. I recommend putting musicians in Palace Guard units, as you really want these guys to break whoever they touch, and sometimes investing that 10 points is often worth it.

War Machines

Bolt Thrower.

At 75 points, this is pricey in comparison to other warmachines, which often deliver more damage. With 2 shots at Blast(D3) and a pretty low Piercing 2, the damage output of this war machine is often small!

However, every Elven army should include some of these. With Ra 4+, these are accurate, shooting targets at long range will be hitting on 5s with 2 shots. And this is one of the most important units to have the "Elite" rule. That re-roll with a good chance of hit means you can rely on these to hit, unlike most other war machines. So generally a couple of bolt throwers should hit something each turn. Another reason these are essential is because the Elven army

seriously lacks any piercing, and while the piercing isn't great on these, it's still long range piercing that can be delivered accurately. Targets for your warmachines should therefore be, enemy warmachines. Typically enemy warmachines are random and unpredictable, but will flatten your units if they connect. And since most have Def 4+, your war machines should be hitting them on 5s, and damaging on 2s. With a low Nerve too, a few well placed hits will break them. Other targets for your Bolt Throwers should be large infantry units, with high defense but low Nerve. Do not waste your Bolt Throwers by firing them into large, low Def Hordes unless you really have no other targets or intend to break that Horde by combining all your firepower.

Dragons Breath.

A much rarer war machine, but at 60 points it's a cheaper alternative. But this is a very defensive unit. With a range of just 12" it often won't see much use, but with a mighty Breath Attack(20) this will burn through most targets that venture too close. Rampaging Hordes of Zombies and PikeMen have all fallen victim to this. Another great use for this is to put off flying heroes, typically a cheap Hero model with the Wings of Honeymaze, flying over your line and attacking your warmachines. Position this so that all your Bolt Throwers are within 12" and at the lose of one of your Bolt Throwers, that flying Hero will suffer a Flame fuelled death from your Dragons Breath, who cares not for Individual Rule modifiers.

So with all of this, where should you start if you are a new General? The 1 Player Battle set is a great place to start. Included is 20 Spears, 20 Bowmen, 10 Scouts and a Bolt Thrower, which have all been covered here. This will come to roughly 500 points, depending on how you equip them. If you are looking to start somewhere, this is a good, cheap way to do it.

In the next article, we will cover more of the units you can choose from, and how to form a decent, well rounded army.▪

By Jonathan Faulkes

By Boris Samec

The Map – Kings of War Scenario

Neil Dixon (Dwarfs) & Alistair Moore aka Platemail (Kingdom of Men)

Here I present a scenario for Kings of War, along with background and brief report of how the scenario played. This scenario is part of a campaign I am undertaking with my opponent Alistair. With a little modification, it should be easy to suit the scenario to any army. Keep an eye on future issues as I report further details of the campaign and reports of future battles.

Scenario Outline

Protected by a small retinue, a courier must make a perilous headlong rush through an enemy occupied valley. Time is of the essence, and the map the courier carries must make it through the valley, no matter what the consequences. Meanwhile the enemy wait, unseen, ready to ambush the threat.

Dermontivich's heart raced as the pounding of drums echoed round the camp. "Ready men, all rise!" said the Sergeant.

Company Commander Pekovich's nightly, intense meetings with his trusted advisors, and soldier gossip had made him expect this moment would come soon. Weeks and months had passed as he had scouted this area. On a hunt the Captain had said, wild goose chase more like Dermontivich thought. A dirty, unkempt boy stopped at his feet. "Sir, the Captain wants to see you in his tent immediately!"

He finished dressing as he jogged, finishing the buttoning of his jerkin just as the Captain's Guard opened the tent flap.

Standing behind a large, wooden, trestle table, the Captain looked up from the parchment he was staring at with a hand held eye glass.

"Arrh, Dermontivich. You are a respected rider, the fastest in my Company," said the Captain.

"Some say so, sir."

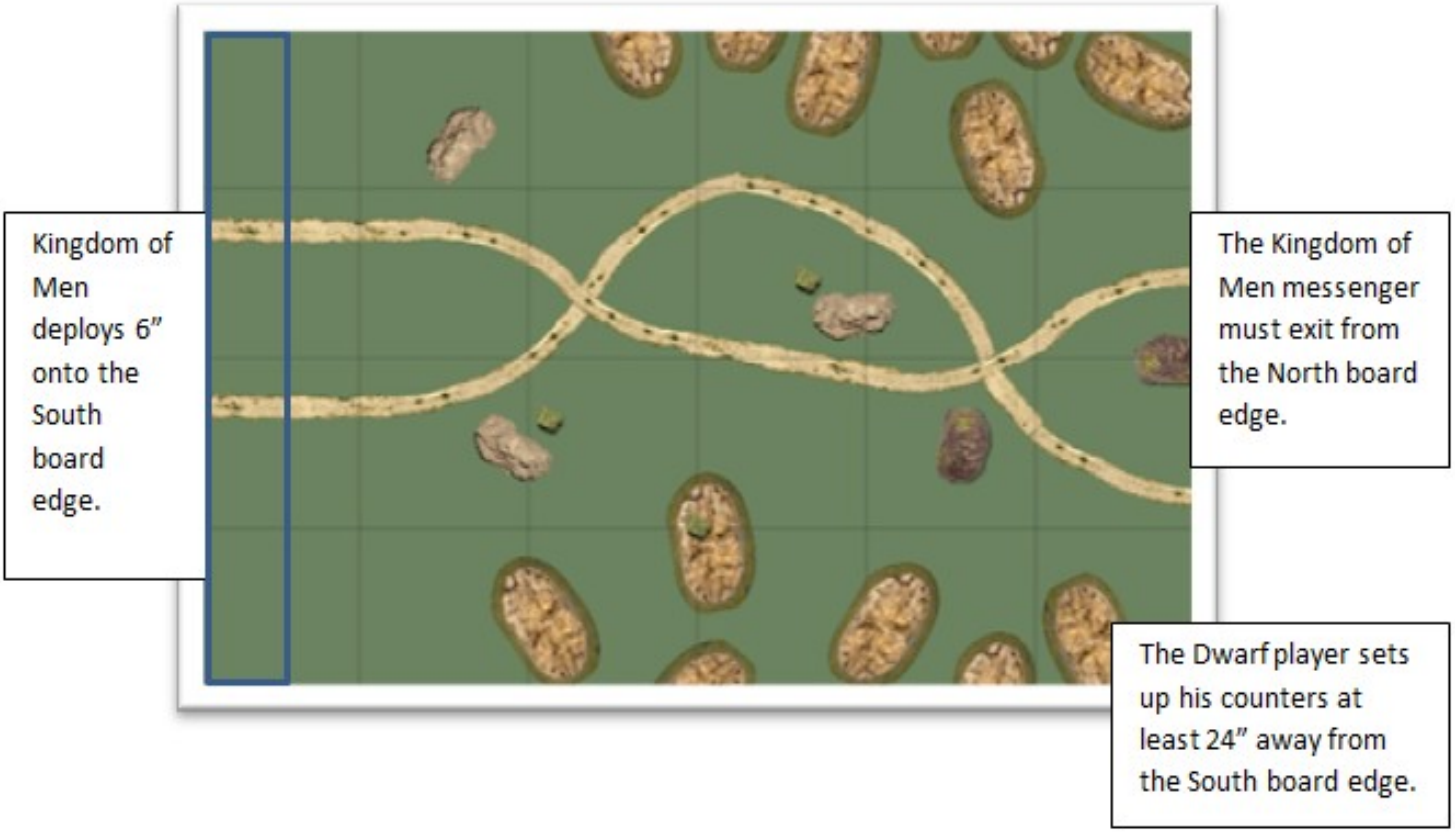
The Captain grunted, folding up the large parchment. He took a burning candle, dripped wax at the fold and pressed the ring on his finger into the wax.

The Captain held out the parchment. "You will deliver this map to General Renovich. We will protect you through the Dwarf infested Williamshed Valley. There you will leave us."

Demontivich stepped forward and gripped the map. He glanced to the eyes of the Captain, as he tried to pull it from his grip.

"Do not fail me Dermontivich. I do not expect you to stop for anything, even death if you can help it. For all of Nivkh we have sought this! Now, you hold a vital clue to its whereabouts that must not fall into enemy hands. I will see you at Valley End. Ride hard now, and Godspeed!"

Army Selection


Kingdom of Men deploys 6" onto the South board edge.
The Kingdom of Men messenger must exit from the North board edge.
The Dwarf player sets up his counters at least 24" away from the South board edge.

Map Deployment and Setup

By Grant Mahoney

Each army picks 600 points from the following;

Kingdom of Men
0-1 Heroes, Mounted Sergeants, Mounted Scouts, Missile Troops

Dwarfs
0-1 Heroes, Ironwatch, War machines (ignore normal requirements for regiments)

Set up

Use a 6x4 board. The picture below is given as a guide. Two meandering roads run short edge to short edge. The roads are in a valley with hills on either side. Impassable terrain is strewn about the valley floor and on the hills.

The Dwarf player rolls a D6, and adds 6 to the score. The Dwarf player has this many counters available to place on the board. The counters are placed after scenery is set up, anywhere except within 24" of the Kingdom of Men board edge.

The counters are numbered, and are placed numbered side down. The Dwarf player secretly writes which counter represents each unit. The rest of the counters are still placed, but are dummies. The Dwarf player may elect to reveal any of his counters at the start of his turn. The Kingdom of Men continue to move past counters in their turn. They can elect to have the Dwarf player reveal the counter anytime during their move, pausing the movement of the unit, so long as a unit or hero is within 12" of the counter. Revealed units can be attacked as normal.

After the Dwarf player has set up his counters, the Kingdom of Men player then deploys his units within 6" of the south short board edge. Units can elect to move on the board in their first turn, but the courier and at least one unit on each road must be deployed in the board.

Both players then roll a D6. The player with the highest score can then choose to go first or second.

Special rules

The Kingdom of Men army includes a courier. Use a suitable model on horseback as a representative. So long as the courier remains within 6" of any unit or hero from the Kingdom of Men army it cannot be harmed. It is assumed a trooper breaks rank and picks up the map, or the courier's Commander inspires him to not let him suffer from grievous wounds he may have received. If the courier strays outside this range he can be harmed as normal. If he is killed, place a marker at the point where the model was removed. Any Kingdom of Men model or unit which moves over the marker can attempt to pick up the map and carry it to safety. To do this, the unit or hero immediately stops and ends its movement on the marker, and can carry out no further action that turn. In the following Kingdom of Men turn, the unit or hero moves as normal. This unit or hero now effectively counts as the courier, using the profile below and follows all the special rules here.

The courier is unable to attack. When attacked in combat, should he survive he must move away in his own movement phase towards his objective.

Courier profile:
Move 8
Me: -
Ran: -
Att: 0
Defence 3+
Nerve 11/13
Special rules: Individual

Set a chess clock at 30 minutes, giving 15 minutes for each player. The Kingdom of Men player must get the courier off the north board edge within the time limit. If he does not accomplish this, the Dwarf player wins. If the courier dies and the Kingdom of Men player has no surviving troops that can reach the map, the Dwarf player wins. If the Dwarf player runs out of time, they can make no further moves, but the Kingdom of Men player can finish moving their models providing they have time left.

Kingdom of Men deployment

Mounted Scouts know the map is more important than their lives as they throw themselves towards the Dwarf gun line

Movement is as normal providing the unit or hero's base is touching the road. Any movement not on the roads counts as difficult terrain (double movement required). Charges not on the road can still be made at full movement but count as disrupted.

A brief report of the battle

The Kingdom of Men looked so numerous compared to the paltry Dwarfs, with Mounted Sergeants, Scouts, Missile Troops and even a Captain. I was playing the Dwarfs and got two units of Ironwatch, two Organ Guns and a Cannon. You do not get much for 600 points! I deployed my counters spread out across the valley, Ironwatch blocking the roads and Organ Guns and Cannon off the road ready to pound the enemy as they filed past.

The Dwarfs got the first turn, promptly removing a Mounted Sergeants unit with Cannon fire. The courier kept in the midst of the Kingdom of Men army, staying very close to the Captain.

The Kingdom of Men advanced, using the Mounted Sergeants and Scouts as a screen and charging the Ironwatch. Bloodshed aside, the units were a needless distraction for the Dwarfs, and were designed as cover for the courier.

I picked off units closest to the courier with my shooting, hoping to strand him and take him out. Till the last third of the board, the

Screening the courier

The Captain and courier launch a daring dash to escape

Kingdom of Men kept as a group, when the courier and Captain broke away from the main army. My last line of defence was an Ironwatch troop and a sole Cannon. All I had to do was kill the Captain protecting the courier and potentially kill the courier the following turn. The Kingdom of Men had minutes to spare whilst I was running low. Two shots later and the Captain and courier were still alive. Drat!

Horse panting furiously, Dermontivich could feel the sweat run off its neck. His ears were filled with the pounding of cannons and whistling of crossbow bolts. Guttural cheers came from the Dwarfs and men, selling their lives for his precious map. He moved his hand to his right breast, as he had done a million times, feeling its bulge hidden in his jerkin.

"Even death will never stop me, even death will never stop me," he whispered to himself. As Dermontivich galloped, he looked left, and then right before spotting the Captain was still alive. The Captain had stayed true to his word, keeping by his side, raising his sword in triumph as he continued to dodge Dwarvern missiles. Riding low, cannons boomed and his horse flinched. The end of the road was in sight and the cannon shots and the smoke of battle gradually grew distant. His horse slowed, and he heard the Captain also, throwing up dust as he reined in his horse beside him. He saw how the Captain's armour was dented and smattered with blood spots from unfelt wounds.

"You did it Dermontivich, the most dangerous part of the journey is over!" The Captain said as he raised his visor.

Dermontivich looked back at the battle and could still hear the shouts of men and the shots of the cannons.

"Many men have sacrificed their lives for this. There are more sacrifices to be made. Ride on to General Renovich! We will continue to hold them off here."

The Captain kicked his protesting horse, and shot off back in the direction he came. Dermontivich continued north, looking back at the diminishing body of the Captain, wondering what was marked on the map in his pocket which was of such high importance.▪

And slip past the Cannon unscathed!

it's a job

part 5

By Aaron Magno

By Paul Scott

The Anvor System was "discovered" by the Corporation several generations ago and has been a profitable part of the galaxy with mining operations throughout the system. Anvor-5 was especially profitable as it was habitable planet for humans and provided large areas for agriculture. Now, however, there was a problem…

It was dusk and Corporal Kreesa hoped that their first outing on the planet's surface would be over before it became night. However, the time his sergeant was taking to yell at one of the officials from the local constabulary suggested his superior had other plans. While leaning back against the side of the APC-13 Warrior Kreesa looked around the farmstead they had been assigned to investigate. Off in the distance to his left he could see Abist and Lozan with some of the local constabulary as they made their way around the farm house. In the other direction he had sent Kosheer and Plajon who had to enlist the help of some of the farm workers to get through various gates. Finally, he looked back at Grimmon who was now in an argument with the owner of the farm. His sergeant was a naturally intimidating figure but when he motioned aggressively with his left hand encased in his power glove he was simply frightening. Kreesa just hoped the sergeant knew what he was doing because facing the Veer-myn in the dark was a deadly proposition and an unnecessary risk considering they were investigating some kind of fruit farm.

"Rothis, what do you know about the Veer-myn?" asked Kreesa as he looked over at the newest rat catcher who was looking a little aimless just standing there with his rifle ready.

Rothis turned to face the corporal, "Not a lot sir. Most of what I've learnt has come just from chatter while I was being transferred. Once people knew what division I had been assigned to they always began telling these stories they had heard. Honestly, I'm not

sure what to believe about them."

"What division? You're not part of any division, you're just another one of us lowly rat catchers," remarked Ealux as he shifted his attention from the large pile of discarded fruit that he was crouched over to the two men speaking behind him.

"That's enough, Ealux," said Kreesa sharply, "So what did they tell you?"

"I don't know, all kinds of crazy stuff. They're giant rat things, which is the easiest part to believe because when I was young my family traveled a lot and I've seen all manner of creature. Although they say they're not animals because they can use tools and open doors and stuff. They live on the big cargo vessels and I guess because we're here sometimes on planets. They sneak around and steal things," answered Rothis, "Isn't Ealux right? We're a joke division chasing overgrown vermin."

Kreesa stopped leaning and made a sweeping gesture with his hand as he moved towards Rothis, "Look around you. A section of heavily armed marines, just one of six mind you, that have been sent down to catch some rats. Think about why you're with us, because we lost a man to these overgrown rats. Yes, the Veer-myn use tools and the ones you'll come across like to use giant drills that'll bore through your chest."

"Don't forget those acid spraying guns that'll melt your face," interjected Ealux.

"Those too," continued Kreesa, "this might not be the most respected assignment in the galaxy but it's no joke."

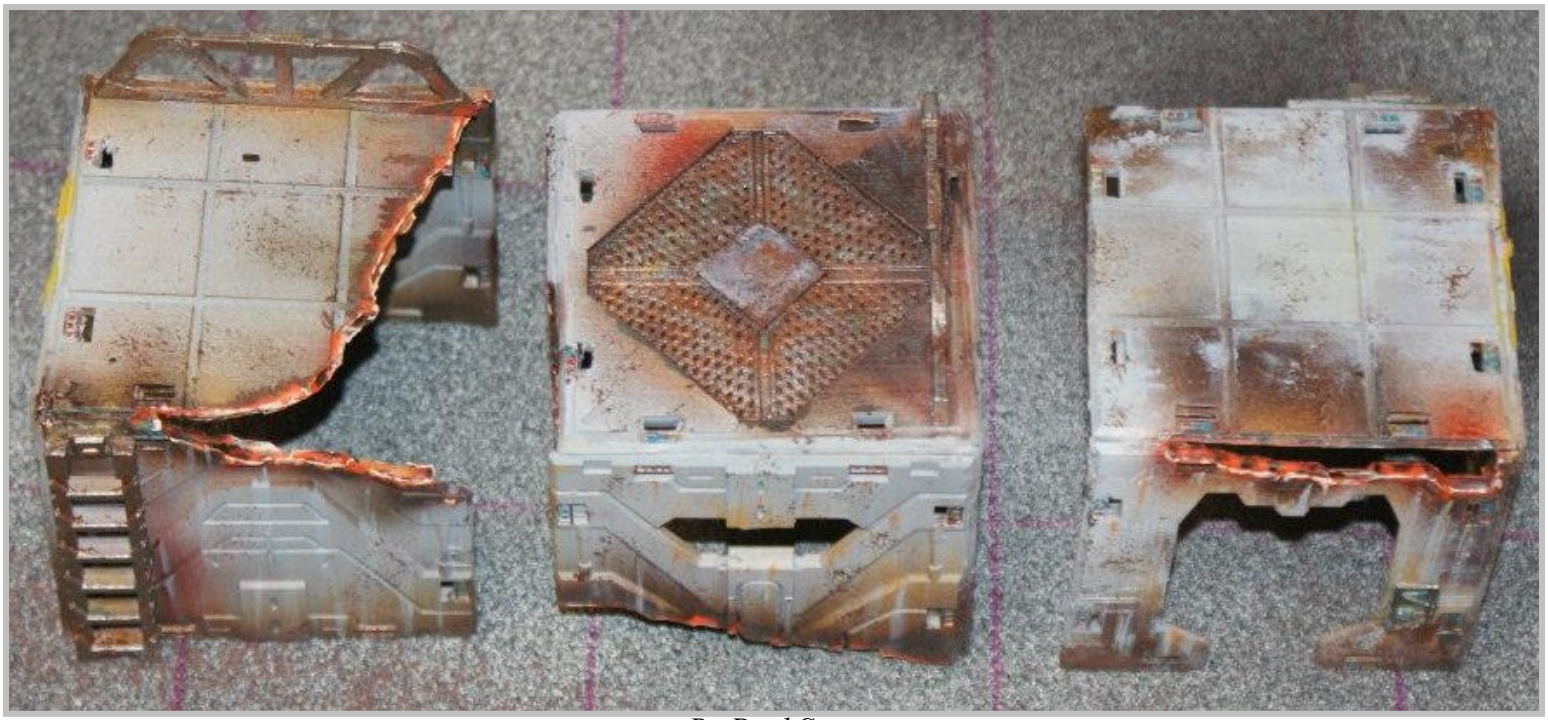
"Sorry sir, I didn't mean..." was all Rothis got out before being interrupted by Kreesa.

"Save it. We're not some elite unit. None of us joined the marines to catch rats but here we all are. Now, you know why you're here and it's probably for something similar to why the rest of us are here. Just know that what happens here tonight is going to be very serious and very dangerous," said Kreesa.

"Well, unless the Veer-myn didn't find anything they liked here and left the area," countered Ealux as he dropped a piece of fruit and wiped the juices from around his mouth.

"Yeah, then it'll be a peaceful night," responded Kreesa with a slight chuckle.

By Matt Gilbert



By Paul Scott

*****

Things had not developed as Sergeant Grimmon had wanted. Having the local constabulary accompanying his men was not how he liked to operate. As he strode purposefully back towards the APC-13 Warrior he had already decided on his next course of action and was immediately communicating to his men via the comm-link located in his helmet.

"OK, everybody back to the Warrior, now! Sprint back if you have to," ordered Grimmon.

The Sergeant did not increase his deliberate pace but as he turned to his peripherals he could see his four men that had been tasked to search the area running back towards his position. There was a combination of bewildered looking constabulary and farmhands following them. Looking ahead he saw Tarvin exit the APC-13 with his flame unit strapped to his back, while Haltrough came running from the other side of the vehicle. Kreesa, Ealux and Rothis were already gathered by the side of the Warrior with their helmets on and weapons ready. When Sergeant Grimmon reached the members of his section near the troop carrier he began addressing them without waiting for the four who were sprinting in their direction.

"Looks like we're going to have a little company on this mission. We'll split into two squads. Rothis, Haltrough, Kosheer and Plajon are with me. The rest of you are with the Corporal. Weetaub will drive Kreesa's team over to one of this place's storage facilities just west of here. There was a nasty Veer-myn encounter out that way about three weeks ago. That's a fairly long time to go without another Veer-myn sighting in the area but that might just be because those rats are really sneaky or the locals are just blind. So be careful out there. My squad's

going to have a look inside the main residency here," said Grimmon before turning to speak directly to the newest member of his section, "Rothis, this is your first live-fire mission and I don't want you getting trigger-happy out there so you're on scanner duty. Haltrough, go help him get kitted out."

As Haltrough led Rothis into the APC-13 Grimmon switched off his comm-link and spoke directly to the men in front of him.

"We're going to want to make sure that we don't have an escort for the rest of our stay on planet. You guys know the drill, load up on starbursts, we want a lot of sound and fury on this one," said Grimmon quite plainly, "Now, if somebody gets hurt during all this then maybe they shouldn't be out here. Are we ready for such an occurrence?"

"Yeah, I got something prepped," responded Ealux.

"Excellent. Let's get to it," said Grimmon before turning back towards the farmhouse.

He could see the rest of his section approaching rapidly and he moved to meet them. Having exchanged Rothis' rifle for a scanner Haltrough and Rothis exited the Warrior to see their leader walking away. Both men ran to catch up with the sergeant, although Rothis found it a little difficult carrying the cumbersome scanner. The device was similar to a laser rifle in terms of length but the cylindrical main body was slightly wider. On one end of the scanner was a very small radar dish and attached to it's right side was a flat screen that presented the relevant data. Rothis carried it partially by cradling it in his left hand and partly using the handle on the end opposite the dish. As they fell in behind Grimmon Abist and Lozan were about to pass them in the opposite direction.

By "Daedle"

"Kreesa will fill you in on the details," said Grimmon as he passed by Abist and Lozan, "Just make sure you've got enough starbursts on you."

"Yes sir," replied both men in unison knowing exactly what their sergeant wanted.

Grimmon continued to make his way directly to the farm house. Kosheer and Plajon had run to a point that intercepted the sergeant's path and waited. The two marines were joined by a group of individuals that included the local constabulary, the owner of the farm and some of his employees.

By Matt Gilbert

Just before Grimmon reached this gathering he asked, "Rothis, you know how to use one of those things, right?"

"Yes sir," answered Rothis truthfully, despite his experience with the equipment being very limited, "But I'd feel better with a rifle."
"Unfortunately we're kind of going in blind here. The Veer-myn love their tunnels so we're relying on you to find them. When we're in there scan and record everything," said Grimmon, "And if it makes you feel any better you're going to be the first to spot the rats."

Rothis didn't find that information comforting in the least.

******

Having made sure his squad had secured themselves in the Warrior APC-13 Kreesa signaled Weetaub to get moving. The sound of the Warrior's engines coming to life didn't go unnoticed. Inspector Loorhees was the first to comment on the occurrence.

"What's going on Sergeant?" the inspector demanded to know.

"As I said before, we're investigating," was Grimmon's only response as he continued

past the inspector without breaking stride on his way to the farmhouse.

After glancing back at the APC-13 heading off into the distance Loorhees quickly assessed the situation before giving his orders, "Falmus, get out there with the men and follow those marines. Except you, Ronson, you're with me."

As some of the constabulary raced towards their vehicles Sergeant Grimmon considered the numbers. Kreesa's five man squad would soon have to deal with four nosy constables. Grimmon preferred that situation to his own with the inspector, his assistant, the farm's owner and half a dozen farm workers following him.

"Inspector, you can't let him barge into my home. My family are inside. No incidents occurred in there. Surely my property is beyond their jurisdiction," wailed the farm's owner.

"Nivaas, your farm operates as part of the Corporation. These are Corporation sanctioned soldiers. Everything on this farm is their jurisdiction. They can go where they choose," explained Loorhees even though he wished the sergeant wasn't so rude about the process.

By Paul Scott

The inspector was well aware the sergeant had no regard for his wishes. This was made perfectly clear when the group of men reached the entrance of the farm house and Sergeant Grimmon turned abruptly to confront Nivaas again.

"Ok, this is your place. You can decide what happens next. My men are going to enter this building. Now, you can either open it up for us or we breach it," said Grimmon in a

By Matt Gilbert

commanding voice that was just shy of yelling as his men moved to take up positions around the entrance.

"But my family..." whimpered Nivaas.

"Are inside? I know and I'm guessing us breaching the door is going to be pretty terrifying for them," responded the sergeant. Nivaas sheepishly turned his head to look at Inspector Loorhees but his gaze was not returned. Finding himself without support Nivaas chose to follow the sergeant's orders and open up his home to these marines. As he approached the house Nivaas looked up at the light coming from the large windows on the second level, which was in contrast to the windowless walls of the ground floor. He reached the entrance and paused a moment to stare at something he saw everyday but never really took notice of. The white of the walls seemed brighter than that of the door they surrounded. The touch panel that operated the door was another shade again and it's location was quite evident despite it's original design to blend in seamlessly with the wall. Nivaas placed his palm against the controls and the door slid open. He turned back towards the sergeant and motioned for him to enter with no degree of enthusiasm.

*****

Meanwhile, the marines in the APC-13 reached their destination. As Lieutenant Kreesa exited the personnel carrier he scanned the surroundings, his gun following where his eyes looked. Lozan was the next one out carrying one of the scanners.

"I've got no movement on this thing," said Lozan after completing a full rotation, "well nothing except the local constab and they're coming in fast."

Kreesa knew he didn't have much time before the arrival of unwanted eyes so he had to get organized quickly. The incident report for the previous Veer-myn encounter on the farm stated that they had made a hole in the rear wall of the warehouse. This suggested that there was a Veer-myn tunnel on the other side of the warehouse. The

smart thing to do would be to have his men circle the warehouse and examine the area near the Veer-myn's makeshift entrance. It's what the lieutenant wanted to do but instead he went with a plan that would be best to accomplish the sergeant's goals. By this point the rest of the squad had made their way out of the Warrior and Kreesa began to address his men.

"Tarvin, you're on point. I don't like this situation and I want to be ready if any of those furballs are around so, Lozan, I want you right up his butt with that scanner. You see anything, let us know because we might have a real fight on our hands. Abist, you're the rear. Keep an eye on the locals and keep up to date with their movements. Ealux, you're with me until we get inside, then pick a side and hug it's walls. I want you out of sight for any and all surprises," ordered Lieutenant Kreesa.

The marines made their way towards the warehouse. Kreesa looked at the darkened structure before him and then he looked up at what had become the night sky. This first mission had not ended as early as he liked. He heard the local authorities approach and knew that Sergeant Grimmon was probably going to get what he had planned.▪

By Paul Scott

WE NEED EVAC

By Tristan Coulson

A Warpath Scenario

This Scenario involves a small force having to hold their ground in a fortified base against overwhelming numbers.

Special Rules

Grappling Hooks: these counts as a single melee attack that allow the model to move to the top of the wall. If models have died on the walls or other members of the unit are at the top this roll is at +1.

Comms Team: If this team is alive at the end of the defenders 4th turn roll a D3 and that is how many more turns the defender will have to hold out for until evac arrives. If destroyed beforehand the attacker has almost assuredly won and you have to hold out 4 more turns.

Overwhelming numbers: If an attacking unit is destroyed they are placed to the side and treated as reserves. When a unit fails to activate it may make a Move or Halt action.

Objectives

The defender is tasked with trying to ensure that they can evacuate as many models at the end of the game as possible. They Score 1 VP per unit that survives until the end of the game when the Evac Ship arrives.

The Attacker scores 1 VP per unit destroyed in the opposing force and 1 VP for each unit within the perimeter. You also gain an additional VP if you destroy the comms team before the defender rolls for evac.

Terrain and Deployment

The defender deploys inside a fortified military structure in the middle of the table such as that available from Warmill. The components of this structure have Defence 11 Tough 3. The Scenario is played on a 4' by 6' table. The Attackers deploy up to 12" away from the Fort.▪

By Chris Schlumpberger

BREACH

By Michael Grey

PART THREE

Containment Protocol - Incident Ref#: 0000037[redacted]..Time Stamp [redacted] plus 683:19 //Evol. Phase [redacted]3[redacted]// Alert Status [redacted]Amber[redacted]//

The transport flew over the settlement, fixed-wing turbines sucking in and crushing ash-blackened air audibly above the motor whine.

The township was called Fourthree, a colloquialism born of a grid designation. It huddled between the outstretched arms of a mountain range deep within Gaian 16's hemisphere-breaking continent, where three tectonic plates met and thrust skywards. It galled the parent corporation to find the Gaian soil, mineral rich enough to breed plants with a native aggression capable of cracking bunkers, was almost impossible to extract.

Still, that did not stop them trying.

Fourthree was a legacy of such exploration. Although what the prospectors found was not ore, nor was it of Gaian.

That was as far as Cas's knowledge went. Whatever it was was deemed important enough to hide. The township was built to cover the excavation. Just another vegetation farm on a planet bulging with them.

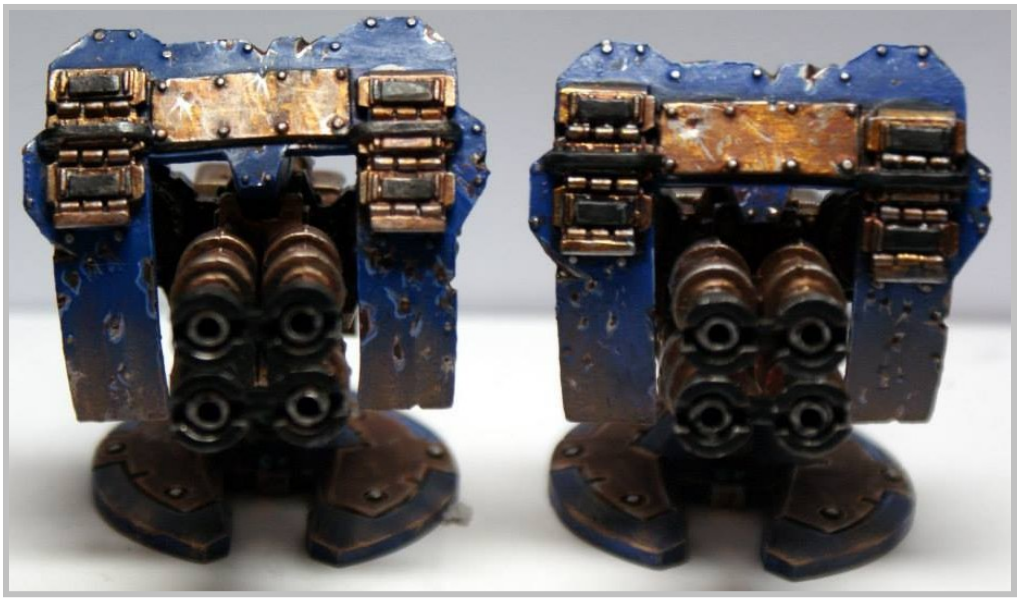
Cas leaned from the bay and had trouble seeing Fourthree. Smoke hid most, surging from broken buildings like it wanted to escape. The rest of the township was there. Just not in once piece. It was as if the buildings had been splashed across the landscape. What fraction of wall or furniture would belong to another was like some apocalyptic child's puzzle.

She caught herself searching, but didn't know what for until she realised there was something missing, something so obvious as to be overlooked as absurdly impossible, if only in the unique ecology of Gaian 16.

There was no growth where the township had been.

She blinked, part surprise, part smoke. Where the forest met the town, where

By Chris Schlumpberger



By Paul Scott

violence had obviously visited, the vegetation stopped. The ever insistent green gave way to parched red earth. It had been more than a day since they had the order to move out. Without the burnback crews to control the flora the entire area should look like virgin jungle by now, as if nothing had ever been here, instead….

Just what had happened here.

The smoke parted long enough for her to see the main street.

"Lieutenant!" The officer looked up from the comms station and came over. "There's movement down there." She had to shout above the engines and pointed to emphasise. He looked and saw what she did. Figures robbed of detail by distance, but clearly moving between and over the wreckage below. There was something in their movements she did not like, but kept that thought to herself.

The Lieutenant said nothing, just looking, ducking and weaving his head between the updrafts of sooty turbulence.

"We going to engage, sir?"

He didn't answer straight away, moved his attention to the horizon, then, "No. It'll be dark soon. Orders are to meet up with Captain Mackalster and coordinate an assault in the morning." He slapped Cas on her shoulder. "Good eyes, marine. And don't worry, there'll be there tomorrow."

He went back to the comm station and she looked back down, taking in how human the shapes looked at that distance and how they clambered over the destruction in an almost insectile way.

***

Fourthree was lost. Had been lost well before any defence force could be mustered. Although to whom the details were vague. The word passing mouth to mouth hinted at a mania brought on from whatever they were digging up in the mountains. Perhaps some kind of hallucinogenic gas. Whatever it was, the operational objective had shifted from one of protection to that of containment.

Captain Mackalster's force had set up camp fifty kilometres to the town's west. The vegetation had been irradiated back to the soil and the perimeter secured.

The plan was to assault the town in the morning light, coming from the east with the sun at their backs. There would be three waves; the first from the air with concussion bombs and heavy repeater cannons, then the ground assault would sweep into Fourthree from the south and north, mopping up any survivors. All in all Mackalster had just under a thousand marines. The rest of the townships would see what happened to rebellion on Gaian.

The attack came at 12:58 local.

***

It was the bark of gunfire which woke Cas rather than the alarm. She at bolt upright on her roll, from sleep to fully alert in an instant. And then she realised there was only gunfire, no alarm.

It was still dark, but a cloudless sky and clear constellations threw enough light to give everything a silver outline, the rest of the details was filled in in clipped bursts of yellow in visual accompaniment to the unseen gunfire.

Around her the squad belatedly awoke, rolling, cursing, fumbling with dangerously sleep dulled fingers for rifles.

“All right, ladies, let’s go!” Their Lieutenant came striding between their squad, securing his chest armour. His soft core-world’s accent unsuited to gruff sergeant rhetoric.

She felt for her rifle and helmet, thanking her forethought of sleeping in her armour. “What’s going on, sir?”

“The autosentries on the outer perimeter picked up movement.” There came another burr of high calibre automatic fire from somewhere in the forest. “That’s them now.”

“We under attack, Lieutenant?” asked one

By Mark Relf

man, strapping on his helmet.

"This is not a drill if that's what you're asking, soldier. We're marines. We're ready for anything. Ooh rah?"

"Ooh rah!" they chanted without thinking.

"You're damn right," said the Lieutenant. "With me."

He lead them to a row of cargo containers, brought in by the military lifters and containing light ground assault vehicles. Around them the camp was already awake and alert. Marines ran to pre-designated spots in their squads, taking up defensive positions, wiping the remaining sleep from their eyes when they got there. The skyline to the east lit up briefly as the turrets let fly with another burst of controlled fire.

The Lieutenant told them to stay put while he went to look for Captain Mackalster and more orders. The moment he was gone half the squad leant against the container and slid down to the ground.

"Fracking drills."

One reached under his helmet and pulled out a pack cigarettes, offering one to his neighbour. "The LT loves 'em, eh?"

"How'd you know it's a drill?" said another.

"Of course it's a drill," said a third. "You think the townies are here?"

"Ain't no one out here but us and them," said the first doubtfully.

By Darren Lysenko

"It's not a drill," said Cas quietly. She was at the container's corner, perhaps the only one of her squad in position, watching the Lieutenant jog low towards the perimeter. Something about the situation made her itch.

"Yeah, no one but us and them, but how do you think they'd get here? Fifty kays through the jungle, at night, with no vehicles. Did you see any roads out of that town? Everything comes in by air. And you think it's them." He laughed and took a drag. The cigarette's end flared as he sucked, illuminating his face in time with another burst of fire.

Which did not stop.

The pitch of the shots changed and tracer fire carved a line through the night sky, bright enough to temporarily blind Cas's night vision. The firing stopped, and the forest was quiet with only the lonely shouts of sergeants to unsuccessfully fill the soundless void.

"What the hell was that?" said the smoker. He jumped up and looked over the container. "Something knocked one of the sentries over," said Cas. She was staring back towards the perimeter, blinking, trying to get her vision back. She could just see soldiers moving around the camp's edge.

"What the hell did that?" This time no one answered. The sentry guns were designed for Gaian's unique ecology, pinioned into the soil, and while it was not unheard of for the ultra-growth vegetation to knock one over, here and now there were other possibilities which pressed insistently on her imagination. "This isn't a drill," she whispered again.

A pallet of crates fountained into the air at the perimeter, exactly as if blown up without an explosion. There was an exclamation of surprise, another of something else. Further along the line the night lit up with rifle fire, calls were made for order, quiet and confirmation. At another point a scream cut off mid breath. Nearby someone shouted, "Pascoe? That you, Pascoe?" The answer was less of a scream than a squeal, filled with things being pulled and torn. And then a roar of something big and throaty.

"What the frack?!" said a marine next to Cas. He rested his rifle on the container and aimed. She grabbed the stock and pulled it upwards.

"Don't shoot!"

His eyes were white in the semi dark. "You crazy?"

"Those are our men." The perimeter lit up with crosshatched tracer fire and muzzle flashes. It was a chaos of movement and silhouettes she did not recognise. "We need orders," she said, noting and trying to control the rising tone of her voice. She pressed the commpad on her helmet, "Lieutenant, you there?"

By Matt Gilbert

By "Daedle"

The radio buzzed and cracked into life. The Lieutenant's voice could be heard between the gunfire ghosting over the radio and across the camp. "-ere. Sta-."

"Lieutenant, what's the situation?"

"-ack! Get bac-etreat. I repeat, ret-" His voice stopped there, but not the transmission. That continued, carrying the sound of gunfire fractionally off time to what she heard naturally, and the obstructive sound of thick bubbling.

She looked at her squad, and they looked right back. They had all heard.

The rifle had taken on a different rhythm. No longer short and directed, but longer, uncontrolled rails of magazine-emptying barrages.

She became aware the others were looking to her as the longest serving soldier. "What d'we do, Cas?" said one.

She didn't know. Training told her to stay put until orders came, so she began to reach for the commpad again when a shadow detached itself of the disorder at the forest's edge and came running towards them. It was a headlong rush, not a thought out retreat. Whoever it was was coming too fast for her to call arms. Instead she sighted down her rifle to give the soldier cover on her own.

She cursed the man's stupidity, he was coming straight at her, denying her any line of sight behind.

What that could mean occurred to her too late, and the figure reached the container, leapt atop it and launched itself at her.

It happened too quickly. She had a glimpse of bare flesh and outstretched fingers, curved inward and glossy in the starlight.

On reflex she fired. The rifle shook with a three round burst and the figure's leap terminated mid-flight like it struck a wall. It fell wetly to the earth behind the crates.

"What the fr-" The squad jumped to their feet, rising their own delayed guns uselessly. She kept sight down her rifle and tried to control her breathing. She tried not to think she saw what she just saw, forced her training to the fore and deal with the immediate situation and not think ahead.

The smoker jumped on the crates and trained his rifle down to where the figure fell. When he got there the cigarette fell free

from his open lips. "It's still fracking moving!"

Her radio cracked again. She hadn't realised it was still on until a sound insisted itself into her ear. A mewling, weak and pitiful and calling her attention back to the perimeter. The frenzy of movement still took place in silhouette, but more localised and less shooting.

And she knew then to be afraid.

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"What was it?" said Cole. Cas's story, from arrival over Fourthree to the rush across their temporary base and the acquisition of a transport to fly what was left of her squad back to Prime, had taken three hours. She skipped details on the wound across her face, but Cole was left with the impression of defending the transport's boarding ramp as it lifting from the ground, and a taloned hand raking from hairline to cheekbone. He did not want to ask about her eye.

"I don't know. It was… human." She struggled for the word. Not in finding it, he thought, but the admittance the she might be right.

"How do you know?" said Jean

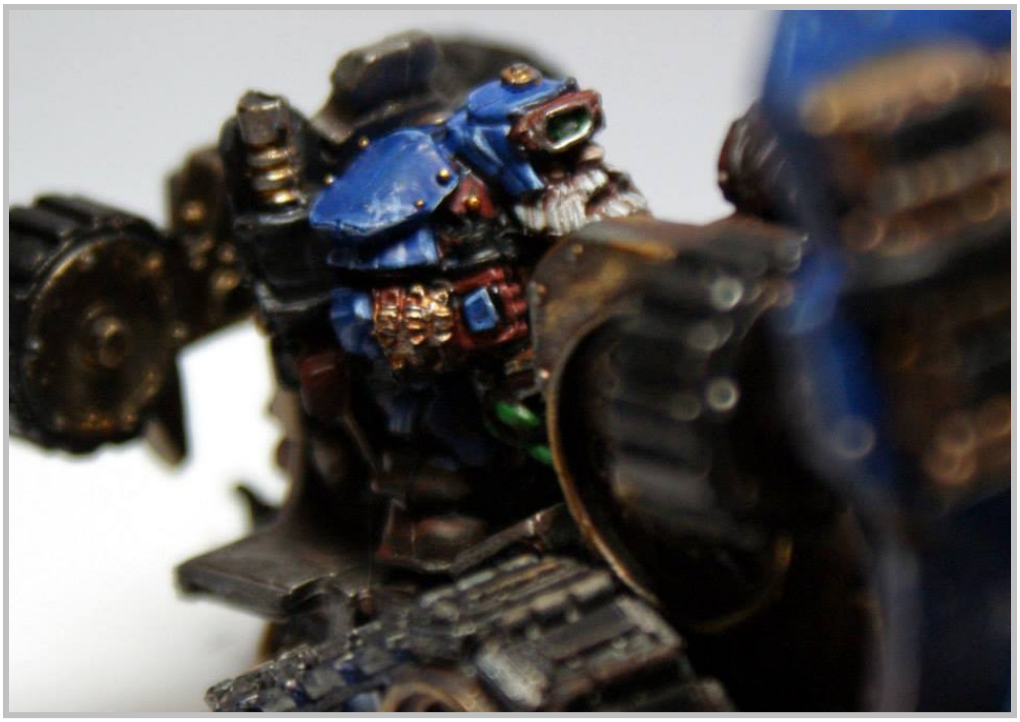
Cas shrugged, an echo of her perpetually cheerful self showing for a moment. "Two legs, two arms. Well, mostly two arms. Some were wearing the farmer overalls. Some even had their names still on the chests." She laughed. Not in a happy way, in a way that said either she would laugh or she would cry, and there was no damn way it would be the latter. "But," she stopped, took two tries to carry on, "But they... their skin was different. Like it wasn't a part of them anymore, like it was just there to stretch over what was beneath, you know?"

He didn't know, and the image it conjured in his mind assured he would never want to.

"Where's the rest of your squad?" said Jean.

"Back to their homes. Families. None of us

By "Hellebore"



By Paul Scott

felt like reporting back for duty, and we saw no other transports lift off after us. As far as command know here we all died out there." She laughed. It was a hollow, breaking sound in the silent apartment. "Nearly a thousand marines all up. The better part of the Prime garrison. I honestly thought we'd find nothing out there, that it was an exercise to keep the forces out in the field, you know? Having an army sat around doing nothing is one thing, having them with nothing to do when they think there'll be no recourse from Central is another. I thought they were just giving the commanders something to think about other than how they could be running Gaian better than the Governor."

Cas stopped and looked into space. After a moment she began rocking slightly. "A thousand marines and most of our air support. They couldn't have seen where we landed, but they came through the dark without light, over fifty clicks in four hours through actively hostile jungle and they overran us in minutes."

She looked at them, her eye empty of emotion Cole would hope to find there. "How do you stop something like that?"

A loud buzz of static and half a squawked word made him and Jean jump. Cas looked numbly down at the bag beside her chair and pulled out a radio. Cole saw how the kit bag, the same one she left with, was misshaped by hard angular bulges. She shook the radio, twisted the control twice, then a third time harder. It kept cutting on and off, and she slammed it on the table in disgust to crackle with half bursts of static.

"But, you can't just give up like that," said Jean. "That's what the marines are for, right? To defend the people. Right?" There was clear panic in her voice. He felt it himself. Not long ago, before the planet had been cut off, word of an enemy force on any Sphere planet would not have worried him. He would have either trusted in the powers that were to deal with it, or plain not believed his safe little existence could be threatened. But that morning alone he had fought another man for a packet of scrounged food and been shot at by soldiers which should have protected him. News of some apocalyptic force in the wilds of Gaian did not only sound plausible, but almost inevitable.

Cas also heard the concern in Jean's voice. Cole saw her expression change from one of defeat to a hopeful half smile. "The rest are still here. There'll be ready." She reached out and squeezed Jean's hand, smiling reassuringly.

Cole wondered if Jean saw through that as easily as he did. His mind was busy with remember maps of Gaian, the outlay of townships running north and south from Prime, making use of the ocean for transport, and the longer trail of settlements snaking east into the continent, leading all the back to Prime.

There were 300 million people on Gaian 16. The majority in the farming settlements which were the planet's reason for being. If this were some kind of mania, the bread crumb trail of townships would lead them straight to Prime. And what if this were some kind of infection? What was the incubation period? How quickly did it spread? Take effect?

An image rose unbidden in his mind, of a wave urge on by tidal pressure, picking up momentum as it gathering water beneath it. Swelling. Growing to crash up the cliff face that was Prime with monumental force.

By Matt Gilbert

The radio crackled again, insistently announcing stilted words. "Wait," he said. "Did it just say something about the TV?"

They all looked at the radio, dinted where it had taken a hard fall, the antenna melted to a stump, but tenaciously relaying what transmissions it could. "----*uni----uni---vision trans*---."

It was enough and Cole scrambled to find the remote, gave up and switched the screen on at the wall. It lit up to the serious face of a woman in a flat grey naval jacket in front of an outsized flag of the Sphere.

By Paul Scott

It cut in mid-sentence, as if they had interrupted a video call as she spoke directly to them. "-ergency. The Sphere of Planets have been scrambled to the defence of Gaian 16 and all its inhabitants. All defence personnel in Gaian Prime are ordered to gather in Landing Square at 19 hundred hours local to receive reinforcements. The protection of Sphere citizens and local assets are our primary concern, so we ask all citizens to remain in their homes during the term of the emergency. Thank you in advance for your cooperation. The following is a repeat of this message. Citizens of Gaiain 16, I am Commander Emille Leon of the Sphere f Planets Stellar Navy. We are here…"
The recording replayed. Cole switched channels a few times. It played concurrently on each.

Hope flared on Jean's face. She turned to Cas and squeezed her hand back, the relief washed away the weeks of stress and worry in an instant. And why shouldn't she? The cavalry were here, with supplies and god-knew how many soldiers.

Then why did he not feel the same way?

Cas looked accusingly at the screen as if she could find a new piece of information in the perpetually looped recording.

He caught the look she gave him and he checked his tablet.

"Still no connection to the G-Net."

"So? The marines are here." Said Jean. There were tears in her eyes. "It's all over."

Cas looked at her watch. "Nearly four." She stood, picking up the bag."

"What? Wait, you're not actually going?" Cole stepped between her and the door, belatedly realising if she wanted he would

hardly be an obstacle.

"Do I have a choice?"

"Of course she doesn't," said Jean. "If she doesn't go she'll be called a deserter when they put the defence force back together. She'll get sent to a penal colony or get world-clearing duty!"

He looked back down at his tablet. Shook it, as if he could make it connect. "I don't like it. There's just something...wrong about it."

Cas half smiled. "You're learning, partner."

He didn't feel like smiling, but then an idea occurred to him.

***

They were above one of the cafes around Landing Square. Cole's explorations the past weeks had given him a good sense of Prime's backstreets, and the restaurant-rich area around the Governor's hill was his choice spot.

The room they were in was once a high-rent apartment, priced accordingly to its view and location. Now it had been ransacked to the bare walls, enterprising citizens stripping everything for what they thought would be a more comfortable future for them. At least now they had a full set of empty rooms to move around in, squatting down to keep below the windowsills, only peeking over them to catch a glimpse.

Outside the Square filled quickly. Marines from barracks across the city gathered densely enough to create an almost slate

By Darren Lysenko

By "Daedle"

grey sea. Among them mingled men and women in civilian clothes with rags across their mouths against the spores and rifles slung over their shoulders. Either off duty soldiers reporting in, or the few survivors from Fourthree finding a new surge of confidence in Prime's chances. The groups flowed and mingled with an atmosphere that was almost celebratory. Cole heard unrestrained laughter for the first time in weeks.

And why wouldn't there be? The responsibility had been taken from them. Backup was here to shoulder the pressure while they would ride on the adoration of Gaian's citizens. Not a man or woman there would have to a buy a drink for themselves in their lives.

But among the newfound camaraderie, behind the backslapping and smiles, something was missing.

"Management." Cas almost spat the word. She looked the barest sliver above the window, only her forehead and fingertips showing. She dropped down and looked at Cole. "You see any higher-ups out there?"

He didn't. The gathering ended at the foot of the hill to the Governor's mansion, where he would assume anyone in authority would be. Somewhere elevated, where they could see and be seen.

"Where are they?" whispered Jean. She looked a little too high and Cas pulled her back down.

"My guess?" she said, "Still in the mansion. That's the most defensible position in the city. Full line of sight, nice thick walls. Rumours are it has enough bunkers below to survive artillery barrages. I think they know something we don't. Or suspect."

"Suspect what?"

She shrugged. "Maybe the same we do. Just *something*." She looked again. "Looks like that could be everyone. Everyone left, anyway."

They looked pretty formidable to Cole. He had never seen so many military personnel in one place before, and they were all armed. And so what if he couldn't see any officials? Wouldn't they be in the mansion, coordinating with the navy? "I don't know,

Cas. Maybe we were wrong."

She had not stopped looking, assessing, searching for clues of what may happen. She didn't answer.

"Cas? I said maybe we were wrong."

"You think?" She looked at him with unaccustomed doubt. This was just too unprecedented, too big. Nothing in her training or creed prepared her for this, and she just wasn't sure. He understood, but caught himself doubting his own words. Maybe he was just being hopeful like Jean, that this was it, and it would all be back to normal soon.

"Sure," he lied.

She looked between him and the crowd, bit her lower lip and exhaled slowly. "Okay then. Let's go."

They stood. A roasting wind blew through the open windows, hot enough to sting his eyeballs. The clouds over the Bubble rushed away in each direction and the air lightened, giving everything a white halo.

"What-?" He began.

"Down!"

Cas threw an arm around his and Jean's chest and launched herself forward, throwing them to the floor.

Before his head struck the floor and his vision filled with numbly falling stars, he saw the sky above Governor's rupture. Immediately after, quickly enough the two events could be inseparable, the mansion shattered. Cracks appeared all over its body, filled with light, and expanded outwards, tearing the building's fabric before engulfing it in a ball of expanding destruction.

The window blinds were thrown inwards by a searing wave of air. If there had been any glass they would have been shredded.

By Chris Schlumpberger

By Paul Scott

He opened his eyes. His ears whined, every noise sounding tiny and faraway. The skin on his face felt scoured.

Cas and Jean looked out of it. Blinking, trying to make things come into focus. He pushed himself up. Outside the sky burned an angry red. Dusk had come early and suddenly as dirt filled the air.

If he had been thinking clearly he would not have stood and looked through the window. But sound was still beyond his recovering ears. Robbed of audible accompaniment nothing seemed real.

The scene in Landing Square could have been comical. As a whole the soldiers had fallen away from the hill, all lined in the same direction like some human game of dominos. It could have been comical, were the Governor's hill not missing.

Its base was still there, but where there was a hill was now a crater. Rocks and a few lonely foundations glowed along their edges. Cole caught himself thinking that Cas was right, now he could see behind the hill would have really had an uninterrupted view of the city, and wondered vaguely if he had concussion.

On the square some of the soldiers were rousing themselves, groggily pushing up on their elbows. Without sound the scene had a dreamlike quality which continued even after the first landing pod slammed into the Square's edge. The impact's violence had to be relayed visually. The concrete pavement shattered under its tungsten shielding, the sudden dust cloud thrown up from the ground and flying concrete chips. The pod opened like a time-lapsed flower, tear shaped slabs of soot-streaked metal as its petals.

The armoured figures emerged before the ramps touched the shattered concrete, hitting the ground and giving the area the briefest of scans before dispersing the closest cover, making room for more behind. Cole didn't recognise them. Fully armoured in interlocking pale grey plates, not an centimetre of skin bare. Rifles of barely human proportions nestled easily in their arms.

The first figure ran by a recumbent marine pushing himself onto his elbows, blinking in the dirty air with obviously no idea what was happening. The armoured figure aimed and fired a burst through the marine. The shots took him in the chest and punched him into the ground. The body was still twitching as the figure ran on.

An abrupt flash at the pod's other side caught his eye, and by the time he found its source another recovering marine lay in an emerging red pool.

The first noise in minutes entered his conscious as another pod impacted on the Square's other side with a muted crash of cracking concrete, and another in the Square's centre where dozens of marines lay just a second before. He looked up to the sky where contrails gave away the arrival of even more pods.

He turned, stumbled. Cas and Jean were just getting up, their faces still overwhelmed by sensory overload. On unsteady feet he did his best to haul them up. Tried speaking their names, unsure at how to pitch his voice when it sounded distant in his own ears.

His first thought was to get them away from here. The pods fell like rain, indiscriminate on where they landed.

His second was prompted by the sound intruding on his ears. The tinny whine of before was replaced by the steady chatter of gunfire, uniform and unanswered as the Square was swept clean of marines.

….END OF PART THREE…

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By Matt Gilbert

By Claudia Zuminich

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